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ABSTRACT

The integration of early reading, writing, and critical thinking skills are crucial to the development of healthy attitudes about writing and literacy in general. A child needs to feel that what he or she says is valuable. For that to happen, children need to begin at a very young age expressing themselves. Writing is an excellent outlet. As soon as children can hold a pencil, have a thought, and distinguish drawing from writing, they should be content writing. Effective writing, however, is dependent on the amount of background knowledge acquired by the writer. Years of exposure in both reading and writing help to develop communication skills. Educators must remember that literacy is grounded in situation--it is not universal. There are many contexts and situations for literacy learning beyond the general academic community. Children should be exposed to a variety of genres within the school setting to inform them of the multitude of situational literacy-learning environments outside the classroom. If a child feels that his or her words are valuable no matter the genre used, that child will feel empowered to make changes and become involved in decision making. In a class taught by Douglas Farough, students experienced empowerment by writing to the minister of natural resources about their views on trophy hunting. (Several reading lesson plans for grade 1 are attached.) (TB)

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The Interdependence of Reading, Writing and Critical Thinking

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Does the thought of writing a paper strike you with fear? If so, why? Throughout my life I have been exposed to individuals who have exhibited this particular fear. I feel that it isn't from lack of self-esteem, intelligence or initiative, but is a lack of early education skills in reading, writing and critical thinking. Integration of these skills at young age is crucial for developing children and adults who can master reading, written and oral communications and analyzation. This paper is a brief review on the importance of integrating reading, writing and critical thinking in hopes of creating well developed and communicative citizens who want to take charge of their lives.

My theory is that in order for children to feel valuable at any age they need to feel that what they say is useful and in fact valuable. In order for this to happen, children need to begin at a very young age expressing themselves. Writing is an excellent outlet. As soon as a child can hold a pencil, have a thought and distinguish drawing from writing, I want to see them content writing. This tangible proof adds value to a child's thoughts in a very personal way. Whether these first steps in content writing are called scribbles or invented spelling, they have tremendous value, especially if the author can 'read' them. At this tender stage of development an instructor's comments are crucial to the value that a child places on his/her work and self-image. Imagine the glow on a child's face when he/she has been told

that he/she can read and write. My point is that positive reinforcement should be the structure behind encouraging children to read and write not constant drilling and correction. If we can instill in children that the thrill of telling a story or experience is valuable, in itself, beyond grammatical errors, we have begun the first steps in helping to create confident writers.

Effective writing and communication is directly affected by the amount of background knowledge acquired by the writer. Years of exposure in both reading and writing helps to develop communication skills. But as educators we sometimes forget that there is more than one genre of literacy. Goodson wrote in *(1994)* that "Text genres are not just literary forms but dynamic patterns of communication, grounded in context and community..." (pg. 7) Literacy is in terms of community. People learn to speak, read, write and behave non-verbally according to the community. Educators often assume that they can teach universal language skills. This assumes that there is one absolute standard of correctness applicable to any situation. Literacy is grounded in situation. There is a multitude of contexts and situations for literacy learning beyond the general academic community. If children are corrected and told that their ways of expressing themselves are wrong it again causes questions about self-worth. I am not suggesting that we stop corrections of any kind, but that we let students

investigate and express and themselves. Goodson suggests that children be exposed to various genres within the school setting to inform them of the multitude of situational literacy-learning environments outside the classroom. His suggestion is that students should have experience in reading, writing, speaking and listening and opportunities to approach a subject in different genres.

This idea of bringing a multitude of literacy-learning environments to the classroom extends each students background knowledge for future writing. Davis stated in (1989) that students often have problems comprehending when they have insufficient background knowledge. Students should be exposed to the differences in their fellow student's lifestyles. Allowing these genres to be exposed and expressed is not only beneficial to the development of the individual but is also beneficial to those who are exposed and become aware of the complexities of literacy and communication.

If a child feels that his/her words are valuable no matter the genre used, that child will feel empowered to make changes and become involved in decision making. One can see that the crucial steps to becoming a critical thinker lie within an individual's confidence to read and write.

Students need to feel that they have the power to make a difference. Farough wrote in *(1994)*, "Schools must be places where students are educated not only to be critical thinkers, but also to view the world as a place where their actions might make a difference. I want them to know that the world is full of fascinating information that they can consume, enjoy and yes, question." (pg. 626) Mr. Farough had a class of fourth graders who were very passionately against trophy hunting and wanted to do more than just talk and write about it in class. So, they wrote to the Minister of Natural Resources to report their outrage and disgust. This class was able to collect the information about the issue, debate both sides of it and compile a letter to the Minister. They became masters of reading, writing and critical thinking and they truly launched ships.

Another example of a class of students who have reached a grand level in critical thinking is a fifth grade math class discussed by Winnograd and Higgins (1995). By creating their own story problems they are integrating language arts and math. This provides them with an intriguing learning situation that is both meaningful and purposeful. Teachers and students can collaborate and exploit the natural disposition to ask questions. Winnograd and Higgins discuss this notion in their 1995 article. The students not only create original story problems, they also brainstorm and critique each other's

work. By generating and solving new problems from old, students deepen and integrate their knowledge. Learners are able to reason, conject, invent and solve. What more could we ask for?

We can ask that educators exploit the reading-writing connection and concentrate on developing critical thinking skills rather than focusing on lectures, handouts and drilling. Sager (1989) says that children must move past decoding and in to thinking, experiencing and questioning. Her idea is that children must connect their knowledge of history, personal experience and new information. Obviously it is imperative to employ the concept of reading, writing and critical thinking integration.

In conclusion, I can only stress how important I feel early integration of reading, writing and critical thinking is for every child. And though the concept may seem idealistic and time-intensive, I can't help but think that once implemented classes would be more enthusiastic. All children have words and ideas they feel are important no matter what literacy level or environment they are in. As educators we need to respect the minds of our students and focus on stimulating their educational growth rather than accentuating their imperfections.

1. Davis, Susan. (1989). Improving writing by increasing background knowledge. *Journal of Reading*, 178-181.

2. Farough, Douglas. (1994). Launching Ships. *The Reading Teacher*, 47, 626-630.

3. Goodson, F. Todd. (1994). Reading and writing across genres: textual form and social action in the high school. *Journal of Reading*, 68, 6-11.

4. Sager, Mollee, B. (1989). Exploiting yhe reading-writing connection to engage students in text. *Journal of Reading*, 40-43.

5. Winnograd, Ken, Higgins, Karen, M. (1995). *The Reading Teacher*, 48, 310-313.

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NAME Patricia Campbell

LESSON TITLE *Whose Mouse Are You?*

SUBJECT Literature

GRADE LEVEL First

GOAL The students will listen and enjoy literature while learning to read and write.

OUTCOME The students will talk about the story and the emotions it evoked. They will apply personal experience to the events in the story. They will work together cooperatively.

ASSESSMENT I will guide a class discussion. The students will perform a sentence drill and participate in a class presentation.

FOCUS The focus will be if the children can apply the story to personal experience.

PRIOR KNOWLEDGE Some students may know the story or one like it. They may have a personal experience that is similar to the character's.

PURPOSE The students will begin to read and write.

PROCEDURE
The introduction to the book will be :
Introduce attached wheel
Write examples on the board
    ask, I am a... and take suggestions
Pass out wheels
Each student fills out their wheel by copying from board or by coming up with their own words to describe themselves.
Introduce book
    Has anyone read it?
    What do they think it is about?
Read book to class

Pass out books
Hold sentence strips of each page up as you read the second time.
They may follow along in their books with a pencil.
Ask what story is about
Ask open-ended questions
Write responses on the board
Pass out one sentence strip per table along with lined paper
Explain that everyone at the same table will practice writing the same sentence.
Pick up sentences
Pass out zeroxed pictures from the book
Each table will get a picture that corresponds to the sentence at that table.
Students will collaborate on what each picture is about and will decorate it together.
Each group will present their picture and tell what it is about. They can say what ever they want as long as they don't tell the whole story.
Later, when the book is compiled and read to the class, we will discuss the differences and similarities to the original.

MATERIALS
books
sentence strips
lined paper
pencils and art supplies
zeroxed papers

COOPERATIVE LEARNING The groups will learn to think, work together and be creative while learning to read, write while creating a story.

PARENT VOLUNTEER PARTICIPATION They may help children with spelling.

CLASSROOM ASSISTANT He/ she may assist and work one on one with challanged children or ELL'S.

STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS They may trace the words from the sentence strips and help color the pictures.

EXPANSION ACTIVITY After project is completed the papers will be made in to a class book. They may start this process by designing the cover.

SELF-ASSESSMENT This is an activity that I planned for Mrs. Jones first grade class. I taught one class and then she did the rest the way she liked. She didn't follow the program so I don't know the results. I suspect that the formulation of sentences would have been too difficult, but I don't doubt that they could have come up with creative scenarios to share with the class.

NAME Patricia Campbell

LESSON TITLE *A DARK, DARK WOOD*

GRADE LEVEL First

GOAL The students will listen and enjoy a story while learning phonics.

OUTCOME The students will be able to sound out words that they read previously. They will be able to write a sentence about the story(with help). The sentence will correspond to a picture they will draw. They will be invited to be creative and scary.

ASSESSMENT The sentence pictures will be hung on the wall. I can assess the work easily. While the story was being read, I noticed who could guess the phonics and who could not.

FOCUS The focus is to use phonics in context.

PRIOR KNOWLEDGE I noticed that many of the students had heard the story before. They were still excited to hear it again, especially since I had drawn the illustrations. They were eager to participate.

PURPOSE I intend to lead the children in thinking about how words sound and look.

PROCEDURE
I introduced the book.
We read the story together.
They read the story while I pointed to the words.
Then I turned the word cards over and they read the book again . They had to guess what letters of the words were missing. Each page had a card velcroed on. On one side was a word. On the other side was the word missing a letter or sound. Wood/ _ood.

We let the children pick which page they wanted to write and draw.
We only let three people do each page or we would have had twenty five ghosts and nothing else.
Each student wrote a sentence and drew a picture.

MATERIALS
book
paper
pencils

COOPERATIVE LEARNING The children knew that not everyone would get their first choice of what to draw and write about.

PARENT VOLUNTEER PARTICIPATION The parents can help the children spell the words of their sentence and make sure it correlates with the picture.

STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS While the students are working on their papers, I can work with phonics on an individual basis.

EXPANSION ACTIVITY Students who finish early can work with me creating new phonics cards for this or another book.

SELF-ASSESSMENT I would like to have done a phonics activity instead of the picture. But I didn't know how well the activity would go. It was easy for most. But until I monitor them individually, it is hard to tell.

NAME Patricia Campbell

LESSON TITLE *ROSIE'S WALK*

SUBJECT Literature

GRADE LEVEL First

GOAL The students will be able to match words on cards with the same words on the floor book. They will also match pictures on cards to the words on the book. This floor book is a book that I made that folds out and lays flat end to end. There are no illustrations on it, only words.

OUTCOME The students will be able to match words with words in context and match pictures to words.

ASSESSMENT Each student drew a card individually and placed it on the book, so I could monitor them easily.

FOCUS The focus is on hearing sounds and connecting it to letters. The focus is also on seeing and using words in context.

PRIOR KNOWLEDGE All of the students had read the story previously and were familiar with the words and pictures.

PURPOSE The purpose is to monitor each students grasp of letter sound and word meaning.

PROCEDURE
The story was read previously.
I made a floor book of the same story.
The students drew cards from a bowl and were told to p[lace them where they thought they should go. [matching word to word]
Some words had more than one correct placement.
Pictures were also drawn and placed. [matching picture to word]
After everyone had one or two turns, we read the story again.
The students drew pictures of the sentences in the book.

MATERIALS
Book
paper
pencils

COOPERATIVER LEARNING Children had to take turns drawing from the bowl and not tell each other where to put the word. Not everyone was able to go twice or place a picture.

STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS This exercise is great for ELL'S or possible learning disabled. The pictures make it a little easier to understand and the words are matched to other same words. Even if they don't completely understand they are involved and feel included.

SELF-ASSESSMENT I would again, like to work one on one to ensure that all of the children are 'getting it'. The exercise seemed easy for most of them. There are no ELL'S in the class, so I don't know how well it would have worked for them. I am gueesing that it would have worked great.

HALLOWEEN ART PROJECT
Making figures from toilet paper rolls and crepe paper

GOAL The goal was to have some fun, follow instructions and develop manual dexterity.

OUTCOME The outcome was instant because as I instructed them, they built their little figures.

PROCEDURE
I prepared precut crepe paper the night before to make the clothes on the figures. I also made the witches hats. I purchased small styrofoam balls for the heads.
I showed the students the witch, the devil and the ghost. I explained that we couldn't all make the same one. So Mrs. Jones passed out red, black and white scraps of paper to each student to signify which figure each student would make. I explained step by step how to assemble the figures.

MATERIALS
Styrofoam balls
crepe paper
pipe cleaner
tongue depressers
toilet paper rolls
stapler
tape
construction paper
straight pins

PARENT VOLUNTEER PARTICIPATION This activity would have been impossible if it had not been for the five other adults in the room. Because it was Halloween, there were several adults on hand to help.

SELF-ASSESSMENT I though that this exercise went horribly bad. But Mrs. And Mr. Jones thought that it went well and that the children just had a great time. I thought that I could apply it to

another holiday and do it later in the year. I was a bit to difficult for first grade.

LESSONS IN PROGRESS

LITTLE CORNFLOWER AND SPUD ADAMS

This is an original story I am writing about Thanksgiving. It is about two seven year olds, one Native American and the other an Early American settler.

After I read the story I thought we could talk about food and possibly cook some things with corn and potatoes.

THE LITTLEST TREE

This is another story I have written for Christmas. It is my way of introducing differences and self-esteem. It talks about many values.

It might be nice to make a play out of this. I think this way the students could fully understand the values presented.